



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN GEORGIA

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Georgia.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Georgia

- In Georgia, there are approximately 4 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 195 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The construction industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by transportation and public utilities, and third by manufacturing.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 5.7 deaths per 100,000 workers – above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 143,900 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in private industry in Georgia.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Georgia

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$881.8 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Georgia private insurers and self-insured employers.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Georgia

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 92 requests for HHEs in Georgia in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Marietta, Georgia: Chemical Exposure to Isocyanates

In 1999, NIOSH was asked by management to evaluate exposures to isocyanates during polyurethane spray painting operations at an aircraft manufacturing facility in Marietta, Georgia. Considering the exposure concentrations, NIOSH investigators concluded that a health hazard existed in the spray painting booths. Recommendations to management included: providing spray painting employees with positive-pressure, supplied air respirators, protective gloves, and clothing; continuing to provide industrial hygiene and medical surveillance programs; and continuing to educate employees on hazards related to isocyanates. Recommendations to employees included: using protective equipment properly; reporting all work-related health problems; participating in safety and health training; and refraining from eating, drinking, or smoking in work areas.

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Investigations

NIOSH developed the FACE program to identify work situations with a high risk of fatality and to formulate and disseminate prevention strategies. The following FACE investigation took place in Georgia:

Georgia: Sixteen-Year-Old Farmworker Dies in Cotton Packing Machine

On November 22, 1999, a 16-year-old male farmworker died in a cotton packing machine. The victim had been riding with a co-worker who was operating a cotton picker. When the picker was nearly full, the operator asked the victim to walk to the cotton packing machine and prepare to pack the load of cotton. Then the operator drove to the packing machine, noticed that the tractor used to power it was not running, and, thinking the victim had walked away, dumped the cotton into the machine. After he and the farm owner could not locate the victim, they pulled the packing machine forward and found the victim within the exposed stack of cotton. NIOSH investigators concluded that employers should implement and enforce a comprehensive safety program for all workers and a policy that prohibits workers from entering cotton packing machines and requires visual inspection and signaling before dumping cotton into them.

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. Since 1997, there have been three fire fighter fatality investigations in Georgia, including the following example:

Georgia: Fire Fighter Dies During a Trench Rescue

On May 14, 1999, a 47-year-old male fire fighter collapsed while assisting with command at a trench rescue. The immediate cause of death was heart attack. Recommendations to fire departments included ensuring fire fighters undergo annual medical evaluations and introducing mandatory wellness and fitness programs for fire fighters to help reduce risk factors for cardiovascular disease and improve cardiovascular capacity.

Building State Capacity

NIOSH Facilities in Georgia

There is a NIOSH office in Atlanta, Georgia, employing 47 individuals. Staff at the office perform general administrative and management activities as well as administration of NIOSH extramural programs.

State-Based Surveillance

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the Georgia Department of Human Resources. Through ABLES, the agency's staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility.

Emory University

NIOSH supports an occupational and environmental medicine residency program at Emory University. In fiscal year 1999, additional support was provided for a master's level program in occupational epidemiology. In fiscal year 2001, ten students were enrolled in both programs and six were graduated.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following are examples of recent research contracts, research grants, training grants, or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Georgia.

Healthy Work Organizations

Researchers at the University of Georgia are collecting data from Home Depot's mid-south region to assess the impact of work organization on the health and safety of employees, as well as financial performance of the company. The results may provide incentives to businesses to be proactive in enhancing occupational safety and health.

Preventing Musculoskeletal Disorders in Computer Users

Researchers at Emory University are studying ways to prevent neck, shoulder, and upper extremity musculoskeletal disorders among computer users. Both postural and ergonomic prevention methods will be investigated.

Activation of Skin Cells and Transcription Factors by Skin Irritants

The pathophysiology of irritant dermatitis is poorly defined, yet it affects individuals in a variety of work environments and is a source of significant morbidity and lost work time. NIOSH funds scientists at Emory University to better understand the mechanism through which irritants activate skin inflammation.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.